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**Submitted photo**

**TOGETHER:** Robert Durham and Andrew Turley were married in 2011 in New York.

# **In their own words: LGBT in Howard County**

## **One Kokomo couple describes their wedding experience.**

*By Rob Burgess*

**Tribune night editor**

[**Editor's note:** After I put out the call on our Twitter and Facebook pages for LGBT residents of Howard County in long-term relationships who would marry their partners were it legal, I received back this letter in response.]

"Mister Burgess: After seeing your request yesterday on Facebook, I felt compelled to share my own marriage story with you in hopes that it will shed some insight into the struggles the LGBT community faces when we are forced to travel to another state to get married. Marriage equality still has a long road ahead of it, and Indiana's proposed HJR-3 bill is only there to hinder our plight further.

In 2011, my boyfriend of ten years and I decided to get married. We had talked about our ideal wedding a number of times before, but when New York became the fifth state to legalize gay marriage, we took it as a sign that 2011 would be the year. We were tired of waiting for our own state to take any steps toward marriage equality, and, knowing Indiana's history of criminalizing any form of social progress, we didn't want to wait another ten year — or twenty, or thirty — for our home state to legalize something my husband and I, as American citizens, deserved.

We chose Buffalo, N.Y. because it was close to Niagara Falls. You see, Mister Burgess, this is the ONLY positive thing about not being able to get married in our home state — we got to CHOOSE where we wanted to get married. And in the end, despite the twenty-four hours spent in a rental car or the botched hotel reservations, my boyfriend and I ultimately accomplished what we set out to do. We got married. We would return to Indiana as husbands, though without any of the rights or recognition other married couples receive.

Like I said, though, we had discussed marriage a number of times before and, despite Niagara Falls, our brisk encounter with a justice of the peace, or the little elderly woman who congratulated us after was far from the idea my husband and I pictured on this, our day. The night before the wedding it suddenly struck me. We were a thousand miles away from our family and friends, people who were anxiously waiting by their computer monitors and phones for the announcement that it was done, that we were finally married. There was no reception after the ceremony. My husband and I didn't trade dances our mothers. None of our friends were there to scream congratulations when the Justice of the Peace announced us blissfully wed. When the ceremony was over we loaded back into the car and went home.

It's a lonely feeling, Mister Burgess, to be in a strange state on one of the

most important nights of your life knowing that our family and friends will never experience that moment when my husband and I gave our lives to each other.

HJR-3, and laws like it, polarizes members of the LGBT community as second-class citizens. The fact that our lawmakers are underhandedly trying to place this piece of legislation on the ballot during a midterm election is further proof of their blatant disregard for us and our rights. And that blatant disregard will be reflected when we hit the polls in November. Nonetheless, I remain hopeful that HJR-3, much like similar bills in other states, will be voted down, that lawmakers will make the moral and ethical decision and proclaim my husband and I — all members of the LGBT community — deserving of the same equality and freedoms as our heterosexual counterparts.

So, to answer your question Mister Burgess: Yes. If Indiana legalized gay marriage, my husband and I would take that leap again, renewing our vows of devotion to one another, this time at home, witnessed by those dearest to our hearts, the other people affected by our inability to marry at home—our families and friends.”

— **Robert Durham and Andrew Turley, Kokomo**

Rob Burgess, Tribune night editor, may be reached by calling 765-454-8577,  
via email at [rob.burgess@kokomotribune.com](mailto:rob.burgess@kokomotribune.com) or on Twitter at  
[twitter.com/robaburg](https://twitter.com/robaburg).